

Foreword

CHIEF Justice William H. Rehnquist regarded the Judicial Conference's creation of the Long Range Planning Committee as "a recognition that the judiciary needs a permanent and sustained planning effort." This Long Range Plan for the Federal Courts is the product of the first phase of that effort. It is the result of a process of continuing dialogue among judges, court staff, Judicial Conference committees, and other components of the judicial branch and between the judicial branch and the other branches of the government, state court systems, the bar, and the public.

The central vision of this plan is to conserve the judicial branch's core values of the rule of law, equal justice, judicial independence, national courts of limited jurisdiction, excellence, and accountability. This conservation provides for stability in society, but should occur in a climate of flexibility to adjust to the future needs of our nation and the limited financial resources of the federal government. With such a vision, the Committee on Long Range Planning proceeded to develop consensus for the treatment of issues and recommendations in the plan.

Numerous comments and suggestions were received about issues for possible treatment in the plan. Many other Judicial Conference committees participated in analyzing long term issues for the plan and in reviewing earlier drafts of this plan. Additional suggestions were made during the public comment period, which included three public hearings. Thoughtful comments came from many sources, including the federal and state bench, the bar, academics, court staff, and others. As a result of their suggestions, the recommendations and commentary of the plan were revised and clarified.

Some suggestions concerned issues that have been deferred for future plans. These concepts and issues deserve further study and commentary by the appropriate Judicial Conference committees. Chapter 11 enumerates some of the topics that have been left for the next planning cycle.

Planning is a continuing process. It is an ongoing communication and decision cycle that periodically sees the issuance of a new plan. This document is not a one-time report on the future of the federal courts, but rather an incremental step in the judicial branch's planning process. It identifies areas where the federal courts might change to improve, and proposes ways in which the courts' service to society can be enhanced. Acceptance and ultimate implementation of this plan will generate a broad-based understanding of the judicial system's strengths, needs, and opportunities. A continuing review of the plan, including both implementation and feedback, will keep the document current and allow it to keep pace with ongoing initiatives within the judicial branch.

Indeed, it is *planning* rather than producing a *plan* that is most valuable—as demonstrated by the history of this document. The Long Range Planning Committee's exhaustive efforts to obtain input and build consensus while developing the plan, and the participation of Conference members and committees in reviewing the plan, prompted a valuable airing of many

key issues. Broad involvement also created many "stakeholders" in the planning process: this plan is not merely the work of the Long Range Planning Committee, but is rather a product *of*, as well as *for*, the entire Conference and all its committees. The stage is set for all interested parties to participate in implementation of plan recommendations and continued examination of strategic trends and policies affecting the judiciary.

No one can claim to have seen the future accurately. Disagreements do—and should—exist in the judicial branch about the future direction of the courts. This plan itself contains both a preferred and an alternate scenario of the future. However, an effective planning process, built on a base of shared values and concepts, allows for constructive debate on future direction. Through that process, the judicial branch can take an active role in developing its preferred future.